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2005

Letter to the Editor

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Custom Citation

Lane, Barbara M. Letter to the Editor. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 64 (2005): 265.

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Letters

To the Editor:

I am writing in reply to the review by Nicholas Adams of three recent monographs on Swedish architects.¹ I was very pleased to see the review, since I think the *JSAH* needs to take much more notice of scholarship on the architecture of the Scandinavian countries than it has done in the past.

And of course I was pleasantly surprised to see my National Romanticism book brought into the discussion as a comprehensive introduction to early Swedish modernism.² But unfortunately my work is not that, so I need to set the record straight.

My book is a consideration of attitudes to medieval architecture in Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, and Sweden in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It says that artists, architects, and designers in these countries, indebted initially to the Romantic movement, saw medieval architecture as so simplified and archaized that they were able—up to the First World War, at least—to be strongly devoted to region and nation while introducing new forms and new uses of materials. These innovations subsequently contributed to some aspects of later-twentieth-century architecture and design.

Thus the book does not offer a comprehensive view of the development of modernism in these countries, but instead alerts us to one hitherto neglected facet of that development. It does not in any way attempt to set aside other kinds of explanations, based, for example, on the pace of industrialization, the availability of natural materials, the influence of British Arts and Crafts design, the influence of Richardson and Sullivan, and so on.

To describe this movement in the arts and architecture before the First World War, I have utilized the label “National Romanticism.” This term was usefully employed by Danish and Norwegian writers from the 1950s through the 1980s to emphasize the broad-based nationalism of the late-nineteenth-century movement while also taking seriously its link to early-nineteenth-century Romanticism.³ These writers did not see the works of the late nineteenth century as either sentimental or imitative, as Björn Linn seems to suggest in the brief passage from 1998 that Prof. Adams quotes. I have built my definitions on this older (and non-Swedish) set of interpretations. But my emphasis is on innovation, combined with a particular set of attitudes to a largely “invented” past. My approach, as I have described it here, is clearly set forth in my book (especially, of course, in the introduction) and has by now come to be widely understood in all the countries I discuss.⁴

Naturally, there is a lot more to my book than a consideration of labels. But as far as I know, there is no “controversy” here that Ekberg, Bergström, and Rörby are avoiding. If they do not mention my book, it is not hard to see why. Ekberg’s dissertation on Grut was finished well before my study was published; Bergström’s work on Tengbom was also much too far advanced when the book appeared; Helldén’s career, traced by Rörby, lies almost entirely outside the scope of my discussion.

For all these reasons, I do not think it is fair to these writers to discuss their work in my terms.

BARBARA MILLER LANE
Bryn Mawr College

1. Nicholas Adams, review of Micael Ekberg, *Torben Grut* (Göteborg, 2000), Anders Bergström, *Arkitekten Ivar Tengbom* (Stockholm, 2001), and Martin Rörby, *David Helldén* (Stockholm, 2002), *JSAH* 63 (Dec. 2004), 563–65.

2. Barbara Miller Lane, *National Romanticism and Modern Architecture in Germany and the Scandinavian Countries* (New York and London, 2000).

3. See, for example, Knud Millech and Kay Fisker, *Danske Arkitekturstrømninger* (Copenhagen, 1951); and Stephan Tschudi-Madsen, “Veien hjem. Norsk Arkitektur 1870–1914,” in Knut Berg, ed., *Norges Kunsthistorie*, 7 vols. (Oslo, 1981), vol. 5, *Nasjonal Vekst*, 7–109.

4. This is made clear in the authoritative reviews by Anders Åman, *arkitektur* (Stockholm) 101 (Feb. 2001), 62; Celia Applegate, *Central European History* 35 (Sept. 2002), 627–30; and Pekka Korvenmaa, *Journal of Architectural Education* 57 (Sept. 2003), 74–75.

Nicholas Adams responds:

Prof. Lane’s letter misunderstands my review and so merits a reply.

I did not claim that Prof. Lane’s *National Romanticism and Modern Architecture in Germany and the Scandinavian Countries* was a “comprehensive introduction to early Swedish modernism.” All I pointed out was that her book lacked any substantial discussion of the architect Ivar Tengbom. Others may disagree, but I regard that omission as an oversight for a study trying to illustrate the complex relations of nationality and tradition in the Scandinavian countries. Anders Bergström’s volume makes it apparent how large an oversight it was. To be quite clear: she could not have known his book; she should have told us about Tengbom.

I offered no position on Björn Linn’s uses of the term “material realism.” I stated that young Swedish scholars may choose to sidestep the issue of

such labels. The debate over terms like “National Romanticism” and “material realism” predates the appearance of Prof. Lane’s book and her definition of the term “National Romanticism.” I am sorry that she did not address Prof.

Linn’s point directly but merely restated her view. I did not take to task any of the authors whose publications I was reviewing for failing to read her book. I merely observed that they had chosen to stay out of a terminological thicket. Who can

blame them? Of course, the point does not apply in the same way to Martin Rörby’s fine study of David Helldén, whose career is wholly post–World War I, and I am very grateful to Prof. Lane for noting that salient fact.

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